

The Social Questions Bulletin

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THE METHODIST FEDERATION FOR SOCIAL SERVICE

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An organization which rejects the method of the struggle for profit as the economic base for society; which seeks to replace it with social-economic planning in order to develop a society without class distinctions and privileges.

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CHURCH AND STATE

Recent events have centered attention on the church-state problem. Mexico, Russia and Germany graphically illustrate the tensions which exist elsewhere in lesser degree. What is the situation?

MEXICO

For four centuries the Catholic Church has played a dominant role in Mexican life. Other groups and individuals came into power and retired, but the cumulative nature of the church's material and political resources gave it enormous power. Its wealth, land holdings, and control of ideas made it a formidable enemy of social change. Today, Mexico's three major problems are sources of church-state conflict.

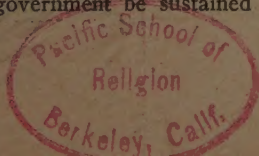
Land. Through confiscation of land holdings of foreign corporations, church, and landed aristocracy, the government has redistributed millions of acres to thousands of peasant families. The church opposes this confiscation.

Schools. With 20% of national budget for education, the government is building schools, and giving education in agriculture, health, sex, science and community life. A spokesman for the church says, "The government educational program in respect to religion can only do harm."

Labor. 92½% of Mexicans are all or part Indian. The Government makes it a duty to strengthen labor unions. In the class struggle it accepts as inevitable under capitalism, it takes the side of the workman. A Catholic Archbishop speaks to workers in pastoral letter as follows, "As all authority is derived from God, the Christian workman should sanctify and make sublime his obedience by serving God in the person of his bosses. . . . Poor, love your humble state and your work; turn your gaze towards heaven; there is true wealth. Only one thing I ask: of the rich, love; of the poor, resignation." (*The Mexican Revolution*, Beteta, p. 59-60.)

Source of conflict. A Government spokesman says, "it is not a religious, but an economic and a political question which exists in Mexico." "The clergy confuses religion with its own privileges which are all we are attacking." (*The Conflict between Civil Power and the Clergy*, Portes Gil, p. 96.) "The actual truth of the matter is that the church fights liberty except when she can use it to her own advantage." (*Social and Economic Program of Mexico*, Symposium, p. 196.) "There is no doubt that since the Conquest, the role of the Catholic hierarchy has been on the whole a nefarious one in Mexico. For four hundred years it has consistently oppressed all social, economic and scientific progress, has indulged in an unmitigated material exploitation of the masses, and in the name of divine right has perhaps been the largest single agency of feudal despotism in the country's history. Its character today remains fundamentally unchanged. Although it was severely punished during the "Cristero" revolts of 1926-29, it is ready to take advantage of any situation and to resort to any means to regain its power and influence . . . at this very moment it is encouraging armed rebellion against the present government." (*Christian Century*, 1935, p. 434.) A Catholic says, "The Mexican Government does not confine its attack to superstitious practices, but broadens the assault, in order to uproot the idea of God Himself from the minds of the young. Religion itself is the object of attack, no less than in Soviet Russia." (*Symposium*, Dr. Thorning, p. 184.) The church has encouraged armed rebellion, assassination, foreign intervention and has used the force of superstition and church decrees in a desperate attempt to maintain its power. A reactionary, intolerant, exploiting church violently opposes a program which should be the expression of its social interest.

Questions. Can a historically intolerant church's sudden interest in religious liberty be sincere? Can an exploiting church's interest in depriving the peasants of free land, scientific education and good government be sustained on religious grounds? When 90%



of the people of a nation are indifferent to a church's attempt to win sympathy for itself, when that church incites opposition to the government through self-imposed exclusion, can the people of another nation take its action as more than a political manoeuvre? Can a church fight democracy for centuries, and expect to remain unchallenged when a government seeking both social and political democracy comes into power?

RUSSIA

Before 1918. Russian history portrays in extreme form the evils of close connection between church and state. Through years of cruel despotism and hardened autocracy the Orthodox Church played its role, along with the dreaded Cossacks, in enforcing the selfishness of the few upon the disorganized ignorance of the many. In the midst of acute social problems, human suffering and gross injustice it steered the course of blind complacency, an aid to exploitation and a sop to suffering. Prof. Macmurray says, "nearly all that religion has been, and has meant, in Russia ought to perish forever from the face of the earth and from the memory of men."

Communist Philosophy and the Church. Communism is basically a social philosophy. Its program of social change begins with economic change. Every step toward economic reform for greater social justice was fought by the Czarist regime and the Orthodox Church. They stood as siamese twins of reaction. To fight one was to fight the other. The church by its attitude early made itself the enemy of reform and revolution. The communists had no alternative but to fight the church.

Decree of January 23, 1918. Church and State separated. Under this decree each citizen was guaranteed the right to practice any religion or none. Public religious instruction of minors was forbidden, but religious teaching in the home was specifically allowed. Church lands and edifices were declared public possessions (in practice churches were turned over to the congregations for use). Religious congresses and executive organs had no juridical status, whereas in the old days the established church enjoyed virtually extra-territorial rights and was a law unto itself.

Decree of April, 1929. This decree defined the protections and restrictions concerning religious bodies. The only essential change made under it was that religious bodies were restricted to purely religious work. The new decree clarified the right of religious groups to secure edifices for the practice of their religion.

The New Constitution. Article 124. "In order to ensure to citizens freedom of conscience, the church in the U.S.S.R. is separated from the state, and the school from the church. Freedom of religious worship and freedom of anti-religious propaganda are recognized for all citizens." An attempt to amend this Article to prevent the performance of religious rites led Stalin to say, "I think this amendment should be rejected as not being in conformity with the spirit of the Constitution."

Clergy, White Guards, and other non-working and exploiting elements were deprived of suffrage as enemies of the revolution in 1918. Now full rights to vote and hold office are restored to all except the insane and those deprived of such rights through court sentence.

Article 135. "Election of deputies is universal: all citizens of the U.S.S.R. who have reached the age of 18, irrespective of race or nationality, religion, standard of education, domicile, social origin, property status or past activities, have the right to vote in the election of deputies and to be elected. . . ." When an amendment was suggested to continue restriction of suffrage, Stalin said, "I think this amendment should be rejected. The Soviet power did not deprive the non-working and exploiting elements of suffrage for all time, but only temporarily. . . . There was a time when these elements waged open war against the people and resisted Soviet laws. The Soviet law depriving them of suffrage represented the reply of the Soviet power to this resistance. . . . Not a little time has passed since then. . . . Hasn't the time arrived to revise this law? I think the time has arrived." Dr. Hecker says concerning the reinstatement to full citizenship "the reason for that has been the fact that most priests and preachers have shown themselves quite loyal to the new regime, and others who at heart are still hostile will be judged by their deeds."

Effects of the New Constitution on Religion. "The result of the new constitutional provision has been a certain revival of church activity. A number of churches which had been closed were reopened, particularly in the villages. A good many people interpreted the constitution as a removal of the ban against religion. This, in turn, had its effect on the Society of the Godless which in recent years had been gradually contracting its activities, considering its work generally finished, since people had been steadily giving up the church-going habit. The membership of the society which at its highest point of development had reached about 5,000,000 members, shrunk to about 100,000, with a corresponding shrinkage in the number of professional anti-religious agitators. My personal impression is that the present effort to revive the activities of the society will not have great results, since young people generally are not interested in the movement because of its purely negative aims.

"My personal impressions are that the organized forces of religion have received a new lease of life. They may do their work unhindered, provided they remain within the field of what is considered here to be the function of organized religion: namely the worship of God according to their convictions and forms, without any interference on the part of the state or any other organization. Since the class stratification of our society is rapidly dis-

appearing, the church correspondingly is freed from class domination. Also since there is no private ownership of real estate and buildings the church is freed from becoming a center for accumulating wealth. Its only attraction under these conditions and its strength, if it has any vitality to show, is in the spiritual dynamic. In short, if there is any vitality in religion, and if it is still a necessity for the life and happiness of the people, the church has an exceptional opportunity to demonstrate it. If it keeps on dying as it unquestionably has been doing, and that not only in the U.S.S.R., it cannot blame anyone but itself." From letter of August, 1937. J. Hecker.

Questions. Is not a period of religious confusion to be expected when a government is forced to fight a church in order to carry out the church's fundamental teaching? Is the guarantee of religious liberty with the exclusion of the right of social action a concession to the historic attitude of a reactionary church? Is not the negative teaching of atheism determined by the negative thinking and action of a socially impotent church?

GERMANY

The Church in 1932. Following the War the churches of Germany suffered a loss of prestige. Their long dependence upon absolute state authority left them uncertain when the Weimar Constitution separated church and state in principle, though the church was still financially dependent. Some pastors urged a return to the Empire. Amid grave social and economic problems, the church showed little interest and afforded no leadership. Workers had no interest in the church, intellectuals lost patience with its pietism and complacency, and youth looked elsewhere to solve its problems. Within the church, disunity and superficial territorial boundaries, together with trivial theological controversies, increased its impotence. The church was as demoralized as the state when Hitler came to power.

Hitler's Program for the Church. Hitler wanted to restore the church so that the church in turn would be ready and able to strengthen his national program. His approach was from two angles: organizational and ideological. First he sought to organize the church into closer conformity with the state, with a single church and a Reich Bishop corresponding to the one party and the Fuehrer. He felt it necessary for the church to forget her bickerings and play a part worthy of the New Germany. Ten years before, the German Evangelical Church Federation had taken a step toward unity. Before Hitler, there had been talk of a Reich Bishop. Lutheran sympathy was with Hitler, so that he felt the Lutherans would be a ready ally in his plan. Simultaneously, the German-Christians (the Nazi group in the church who as the name implies put Germany before Christianity) whose ideas were supposed to bring new life into the church, became very active. Backed by Hitler, they sought to present a new theology upon which the church could organize and be prepared to meet the needs of the New Germany.

Surprising Opposition. The program met immediate opposition. Distaste for parts of the Nazi ideology and disapproval of the new plan of organization are so intertwined that it is difficult to separate them. The church would probably have been satisfied to follow its traditional course of compliance in political matters, had not the state tried to force the church into a doctrinal alliance.

Here Hitler underestimated the innate conservatism of the church. The attempt of the German-Christians to make Hitler's Jewish attitude official church doctrine met stern opposition. Even many friendly to him and his plan of organization, protested this violation of Christian teaching. In March, 1933, he tried to pacify the opposition saying, "The rights of the church are to remain unchanged and the relation of the church to the state need undergo no alteration." The German-Christians however, as a political duty, were reviving interest and enthusiasm for the church and were not willing to proceed with care. A Constitutional Committee, with Müller representing Hitler, reported a mild constitution, with the non-Aryan clause deleted, providing for a united church under a Lutheran Reich Bishop. The Committee of Three nominated the capable and respected Dr. von Bodelschwingh as Reich Bishop, and a plebiscite of 28 German territorial churches overwhelmingly confirmed the nomination.

The German-Christians backed by Hitler and Müller, refused to accept the vote, and used privilege of radio and official press to affirm that Müller as confidante and advisor of Hitler was alone eligible for the office. They became for the church what the storm troops had been for the nation. A series of political manoeuvres convinced Dr. von Bodelschwingh that the state was determined to gain control of the church. He resigned in protest. Dr. Jaeger, a Nazi, was appointed State commissioner of all the Evangelical churches in Prussia. Through political pressure and forced resignations, the German-Christians soon gained control of the administrative machinery of the church.

Non-Aryan Clause Enacted. The election of officers for the church corporations under the new constitution found Hitler campaigning for the German-Christians. They won. It was no longer a question of whether state should dominate church, but of whether the churches would recognize the Nazi political faith and submit to the Nazi revolution. Laws were enacted to give German-Christians more control and drive out non-conforming elements. The non-Aryan law was enacted in spite of the constitution, 20 new bishoprics were created, and all appointees were German-Christians. The reorganization was well begun.

Determined pastors refused to accept the changes. They rejected the new regulations as well as the new theology. The writings and speeches of Müller, Rosenberg, Hossenfelder, Krause, Bergmann, and Loerzer violated the basic Christian concepts of many pastors. The Emergency Pastors' Federation was formed under Dr. von Bodelschwingh to organize the opposition. Müller was forced to resign.

The Directorate. In 1935, Hanns Kerrl, Nazi minister of church affairs, took over control of the churches by decree, creating a directorate which "administers the German Evangelical Church, issues decrees, directs the church administrative bodies, appoints and dismisses church functionaries with the permission of the minister of church affairs, and represents the church in its external relationships." The state offered a compromise to the confessional (Evangelical) synod by which they would gain power in the directorate, but the offer was accompanied with the threat of disestablishment if rejected, which few pastors would be brave enough to face. Kerrl further demanded the dissolution of the confessional synod, confiscation of its funds, absolute censorship of synod and pastors, and removal of powers and functions of the church organization.

This action brought as much opposition to Kerrl as had plagued Müller. Attempts at a truce with the Protestants until the Catholic issue should be settled was too obvious a move to divide the opposition. The election ordered by Hitler for February, 1937, has been indefinitely postponed due to the intensity of the opposition to it. At present Hitler seems to be proceeding with caution, while a *quiet* campaign is being carried on to *win over* the opposition. The confessional synod has been driven "under-ground," and many pastors are in custody or concentration camps. But resistance is more determined than ever.

The Catholic Church. Because of better organization the Catholic Church was in a stronger position, and able to demand more favorable concessions in the concordat between von Papen and the Pope. But interference with school and youth has brought the Catholic church to charge violation of the concordat, and in effect throw its support with the Protestant Confessional Synod.

The Larger Issue. The German Protestant church, like Protestantism elsewhere, has aligned itself with the non-Christian principles of capitalism, by action, if not by principle. It has failed to accept the social implications of its own gospel. In protecting its organization, it has been forced into the dilemma of social reaction with emphasis on pietism and quietism, or of alignment with a fascist state.

The working agreement between the church and state in Germany has always been based on artificiality, for the recognition of one phase of the gospel with careful avoidance of the other equally important phases, was sure to bog down when it was forced to an evaluation of its basic principles. The German church now finds itself in a socially untenable position because of centuries of social complacency. Though thousands of heroic pastors are fighting for their rights as a church to manage its own affairs, they have not yet started to fight for the full gospel that would have saved the church from its present dilemma, and can yet save protestantism under democracy from ever being forced into such a position.

Will the German church be satisfied with a compromise that will allow it to go back into its pietistic seclusion and social impotence, or will it see the demands for a socially virile gospel that not only fights for freedom of conscience, but for freedom for society to grow into a fuller measure of its spiritual possibilities?

THE BASIC QUESTION

In Mexico and Russia the church as an organization has been historically anti-social; in Germany, non-social. In each case, the church has reaped the results of its neglect of the social implications of its gospel. Can the church be made to realize the nature of this tacit commitment to what is socially unchristian? Will the church comprehend that its fundamental alignment is with social idealism? Or, will it, through negligence, invite the condemnation of those it should serve?

SAVE THESE DATES!

The Eastern Regional Fall Conference of the Federation is scheduled for December 3rd and 4th. The November *Bulletin* will carry further details.

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